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PROPOSED STATISTICAL LEGISLATION.

The bill of greatest interest to statisticians which has been introduced in the Fifty-Second Congress is the measure providing for a permanent organization of the Census Bureau (S. 690). The bill was drafted by the Superintendent of the Census, and is the outcome of a resolution passed by the Senate, February 16, 1891, instructing the Secretary of the Interior to report on the advisability of making the Census Bureau permanent. The main features of the bill may be briefly rehearsed. Section 1 reads —

“That a census of the population, wealth, and industry of the United States shall be taken as of the date of October first, nineteen hundred, and once in every ten years thereafter, as of the said date of October first: and that there shall be a periodic collection of vital and social statistics, and of statistics of agriculture, manufacture, mining, fisheries, churches, education, finance, transportation, and insurance, to be made as hereinafter provided.”

It will be observed that the proposed law changes the census day from June to October. The date is much more satisfactory than the present date. European countries, as a rule, take a midwinter date, but it is believed that the date here chosen would be better than a later date, especially in the northern sections of the country with their rigid winter weather. Moreover, the date avoids the difficulties caused by summer migrations quite as well as if later in the winter.

The section quoted indicates also the scope of the inquiries to be carried on by the Bureau, and has therefore been given in full. The subsequent sections of the bill relate to the details of administration, and may be passed over more rapidly. The proposed Bureau remains in the Interior Department, and is to be organized as soon as practicable. The Superintendent of the Census, at a salary of \$6000, is given the assistance of a chief clerk, a disbursing clerk, and five chiefs of division, “who must be statistical experts,” at \$2500 annually, besides the necessary clerical force. It may be noted here that the expenditure of the office, for the ordinary years, is estimated at \$200,000, exclusive of printing. Many sections of the bill relate to the manner in which the decennial census shall be taken, and substantially re-enact the provisions of the present law. Among the new features are provisions that enumerators receive a per diem compensation of three dollars for a day of ten hours, instead of the pre-

vailing system of payment according to the number of schedules returned, and, further, the threatening with fines of *all* persons in whatever capacity who refuse to answer the questions contained in the schedules, of whatever description they may be. Under the proposed law enumerators are to be appointed as heretofore by the supervisors of districts. A change, however, is to be noted in the appointment of clerks. At the inauguration of the Bureau the clerks are to be selected by the secretary from the "trained clerks and experts of the Eleventh Census, who shall have served therein satisfactorily for a continuous period of at least two years, and who shall have received from the Superintendent of the Census a certificate to that effect." All other appointments are to be made under the Civil Service rules.

The bill also provides that should any state take a census of inhabitants in the year mid-way between the decennial censuses according to forms and schedules approved by the Superintendent of the Census, the United States shall, upon a requisition from the state in question, pay one-half of the certified cost of such census.

It cannot be our object here to discuss the bill section for section, and it is believed that in the foregoing summary the main points of the proposed measure are set forth. To understand the bill thoroughly we must go back to the report on which it is based.

The crucial point of the bill is the proposed permanence of the Census Bureau. The arguments for such an organization have been repeatedly brought to public notice. Briefly, the advantages of a permanent bureau may be summarized as follows: The saving of time now lost in training clerks and chiefs of divisions; the preservation of essential records; and, finally, a more complete preparation for the work of the enumeration. These arguments find forcible expression in the report of Superintendent Porter. These general considerations are sufficiently familiar to statisticians, but the report gains its vigor from the wealth of specific illustration which it gives. Mr. Porter pursues the ingenious method of reviewing, division by division, the work of his bureau, and showing, step by step, where a permanent organization would benefit the service. It cannot be our purpose to follow him through his arguments, but a few illustrations will suffice. Under the present system the amount of time spent in supervising appointments is unduly large. The temporary character of the work precludes to a large extent the employment of Civil Service clerks, and thus necessitates this machinery.

Consider for a moment the training of chiefs of divisions and clerks. All who are familiar with statistical work know that every statistician learns through his own blunders rather than through those of other people. Now, our present system requires that such blunders must be made and such experience gained once in ten years, unless, indeed, the Superintendent of the Census is always as fortunate as Mr. Porter has been in securing the services of chiefs of division who were employed in a like capacity in previous years. It is needless to say that this cannot always be the case.

Again, consider the item of clerks. Not long ago it was stated in the House of Representatives that the clerks in the division of farms, homes, and mortgages "did not know the difference between a mortgage and a bale of hay." The statement was promptly characterized as an exaggeration, but the mere suggestion points out the difficulties of dealing with an intricate subject with raw clerks. While the greatest difficulty in statistical work is just as apt to come from persons who know too much as from those who know too little, ignorance may be too dense for efficient work. In the work of the division mentioned some general knowledge of the nature of a mortgage is required; in the division of vital statistics some knowledge of the nomenclature of disease; in that of crime some knowledge of the names of crimes; and, in short, in each division, as Mr. Porter clearly shows, there is a certain minimum of information which is the prerequisite of good work. It is not meant that this is more than ordinary clerks can compass, but that this work must be taught a fresh set of clerks once in ten years.

Another gain from a permanent Bureau made prominent in the report is the preservation of records. A vast amount of accessory material, such as lists necessarily unpublished, is collected by the various divisions to facilitate their work. Its preservation and completion from time to time would be a great economy. The reader will find some very striking illustrations to this text in the report of Mr. Porter. He mentions the following lists: Minor civil subdivisions of the country, officers of religious bodies, jails and similar institutions, municipal officers, recording officers, manufacturers, mining operators, transportation companies. One can readily see that it is no little labor to construct these lists, but a comparatively simple one to keep them up-to-date when once made. At present each list must be made anew once in ten years.

“ In 1880 the Census law was not passed until March 3, 1879, and further legislation affecting the work of enumeration of population was had as late as April 20, 1880. In 1890 the census law was not approved until March 1, 1889, and legislation making it necessary to insert additional inquiries on the population schedule was approved as late as February 22, 1890, about three months before the enumeration began. It therefore became necessary to print 20,000,000 schedules and distribute them throughout the country in ninety days.”

With these facts Mr. Porter describes one of the greatest defects of the present antiquated system of carrying on the census. Such an important work as the census needs the most careful and well considered preparation. We have at present no guarantee that it will receive that attention, and it is a gross injustice to the Superintendent of the Census to expect a perfect organization of his work in the brief time usually allotted to it.

To his report, of which the above aims to give the essence rather than an abstract, Mr. Porter has added communications from statisticians, commercial bodies, agricultural commissioners, state boards of health, labor bureaus, churchmen, and alienists. It contains, further, the draft of the bill discussed above, a chronological review of census legislation, the census acts of 1790, 1850, and 1879, and the forms of schedules used in each census from the First to the Eleventh.

The communications from the sources above named are practically unanimous in favor of the proposed permanent bureau. The arguments stated are much the same as those discussed, save that in each case the expression of opinion takes some color from the point of view of each writer.

Among the incidental advantages of permanency in the Census Bureau, some of the writers dwell very properly on the collection of a statistical library. This is something which statistical students would greatly appreciate, and which at present is lacking at Washington. If no where else, centralization of statistical work is very desirable in a library.

In general these communications subordinate the question of organization to that of function. The commercial bodies approve the plan and desire more complete and more frequent information on questions of commerce, manufacture, transportation. The agricultural organs believe that a permanent census bureau could do much for obtaining accurate agricultural statistics. The officers of state boards of health

believe that vital statistics could be improved through the direct or indirect agency of a permanent bureau. Officers of insane asylums hold that a permanent bureau could contribute greatly to a more perfect knowledge of the insane in this country.

Much the same tendency is to be noted in the letters from statisticians. The question of organization, however, receives more attention from them. The European statisticians, who know no other method, approve completely the idea of a permanent bureau, and give some account of the form of organization in their respective countries.

The question, what shall be the scope of the proposed bureau, is one partly of function and partly of organization,—a question of function as to the extent of the inquiries, a question of organization in its relation to the other statistical work of the government. It is the weak point of the report and the bill that this question is avoided. There can be little doubt that the efficiency of the proposed bureau is largely dependent on the character of its work in the years intervening between the decennial censuses. It would seem advisable that that work should be clear and well defined. It would seem essential that if the proposed bureau is to mould our future statistics, it should occupy a commanding position in the statistical work of the government. Furnished with an appropriation as estimated in the report, only slightly in excess of that now enjoyed by the Department of Labor, and without clearly defined relation to the statistical work now going on in that department, and in the Treasury, State, and Agricultural departments, in the Bureau of Education, the Geological Survey, the Fish Commission, and the Interstate Commerce Commission,* it would seem that the proposed bureau could not fill the role which might naturally be expected.

It will be seen from the bill that the scope of the Bureau's work is as wide as that of the Census. The superintendent speaks of possible work in Agriculture, Mining, Fisheries, Transportation, and Education. This must clearly conflict with the present bureaus at work, and it seems unfortunate that no attempt has been made to fix the relations between them. The question is a delicate one, and it is easily understood why it should be avoided. But to our view it is a question which must be met in the long run. Some of the communi-

* See Willoughby, Statistical Publications of the United States Government, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. II, p. 236 (Sept., 1891).

cations speak of the question in a tentative way, and suggest as possible solutions either the centralized bureau or the commission plan. Either plan would be an improvement, would give a higher character to the work as a whole, and would render duplication impossible. The advantages of each system are familiar to statisticians. The reorganization of the statistical work of the government seems a prerequisite of any advance through a permanent census bureau, and it is much to be regretted that the report and bill under discussion do not grapple with this question.

A bill (S. 1201) of purely administrative import has been introduced as an amendment to the act to provide for taking the Eleventh Census. It extends the penalties for a refusal to give information to census inquiries to companies, firms, and persons engaged in any productive industry.

No special collection of wages will take place in the Eleventh Census apart from the treatment of the subject under the various industries. A resolution (S. R. 20) has been introduced into the Senate contemplating the continuation of Volume XX of the Tenth Census. It authorizes the Superintendent of the Census to employ Mr. Jos. D. Weeks, of Pittsburgh, to do this work, and appropriates fifty thousand dollars for the purpose.

An echo of the Farmers' Alliance is found in a bill (S. 670) introduced by Senator Peffer (by request). It provides for a special census, asking of persons, firms, associations, and incorporations the value of property owned, the amount of debt and interest on the same, the amount of "use-money paid for use of rooms, buildings, grounds, or anything else." The intent of the act is mentioned "that the people may know how to legislate on the money question." A curious feature is a provision for the publication of the names of all persons who refuse to answer the questions.

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